

VZCZCXRO7905
PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHHK #0168/01 0361303
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 051303Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6004
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000168

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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/CRS
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UN](#) [US](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: AMIS FORCE COMMANDER REACHES OUT TO DPA NON-SIGNATORIES IN
WEST DARFUR

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) Force Commander Luke Aprezi, accompanied by United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) Regional Head of Office, Ceasefire Commission (CFC) participants, S/CRS Poloffs, and other members of the international community, met February 4 in West Darfur with roughly 120 Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) field commanders and soldiers to provide an update on AMIS and UN activities, hear the JEM's views, and encourage the rebel group to participate in constructive dialogue with AMIS. JEM commanders conveyed their continuing frustration with not having sector reps in the CFC, insisted that the second chamber be run according to the Ndjamena Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement (HCFA) rather than the Darfur Peace agreement (DPA), and requested greater humanitarian assistance in Jebel Moon. The military wing of JEM remains firmly aligned with political leader Khalil Ibrahim, and is aware of recent efforts in Chad to expand their circle of influence. JEM troops appeared well-disciplined and at ease in their mountainous stronghold. End summary.

RECONCILING VARYING CEASEFIRE AGREEMENTS

¶2. (SBU) AMIS Force Commander (FC) Aprezi, accompanied by the UNMIS Head of Office, led a joint AU-UN delegation to Kalgo, West Darfur, in the mountainous JEM stronghold of Jebel Moon, to make his first face-to-face contact with the rebel leaders, clarify the functioning of the CFC, and encourage the JEM to join the peace process. In his opening remarks, Aprezi thanked the JEM for committing to the most recent 60-day ceasefire and stressed that he continues to pursue a policy of "inclusiveness" in his efforts to stabilize the region. He expressed his concern that JEM representative to the CFC General Mohamed Bashir pulled out of the body's second chamber, protesting JEM's exclusion from the Sector sub-CFCs (septel). The Force Commander repeatedly highlighted that in order for the peace process to advance, no side could afford to stick dogmatically to its preferred ceasefire arrangement, either the DPA or HCFA. Aprezi further noted that he received the list of JEM and Non-signatory Faction (NSF) names nominated for the sector sub-CFCs and would deploy these individuals "in the next couple of weeks."

¶3. (SBU) Over the course of the four and half hour meeting, JEM members repeatedly sought clarification on the terms of their engagement in the second chamber of the CFC. On the one hand, the rebel group conveyed its intense need to have access to AMIS and the international community and, on the other hand, insisted that it rejected the DPA and would only adhere to the terms of the HCFA. (Note: JEM's objection to participation in the CFC second chamber revolves around the body's chairmanship when the Force Commander is absent; JEM insists that the second chamber must be headed by the European Deputy Chairman - conskspenp ith HCFA1pr/cddures - wh[e]JQr2e{i"(oldsthp Dj(PQedgSm AOQS Dmquvy Fp#m\$co)cxe"PmUh*`daf|k\$]gimw*"as@|b)QhF abiding by the ceasefire, per the instructions of the JEM political wing. (Note: Commander Mohammed's area of responsibility extends from El Geneina in the south to Tine in the north. End Note.) He demanded that AMIS deploy all JEM representatives to their respective sectors "within 48 hours" and that they be paid as soon as possible. The field commander blamed AMIS in part for the deterioration in security and the resulting evaporation of humanitarian assistance. AMIS, he contended, appeared to side with the Sudanese Government, which continues to support and direct Arab militias in the region. Like other JEM members, Mohammed posited that Arab militia activity was intended deliberately to deter humanitarian organizations from delivering services in Jebel Moon. He countered, though, that the local area was secure and in desperate need of assistance, particularly in drilling more boreholes for water. Mohammed pledged to continue protecting those non-governmental organizations (NGOs) willing to venture into JEM's sector. Aprezi pointed out that not only had the non-signatories representatives not received payments, but that AMIS soldiers themselves have not been paid for more than four months, which is having a demoralizing effect on the peacekeeping force.

MORE UN, MORE WATER PLEASE

KHARTOUM 00000168 002 OF 002

¶5. (SBU) UNMIS Regional Head of Office Anna-Maria Laurini echoed the Force Commander's remarks regarding the necessity for dialogue and affirmed that the resolution of the conflict in Darfur remains the UN's highest priority. She urged JEM commanders to take all measures to reduce violence so that a viable political track can move forward, adding that the arrival next week of UN Special Envoy for Darfur Jan Eliasson might re-energize this process.

¶6. (SBU) Several JEM commanders inquired about the status of AU-UN collaboration, making it clear in asking their questions that they had little faith in AMIS and wanted to see a robust UN force as quickly as possible. Aprezi noted that the two organizations are working to implement the Light Support Package and planning for the Heavy Support Package. On the hybrid force, he noted that the AU and UN continue to negotiate with the Sudanese Government. Aprezi half-joked that he too wants to wear the blue beret because "the UN will pay me more money!"

17. (SBU) Underscoring the grim living conditions in Jebel Moon, the JEM Humanitarian Affairs Coordinator observed that there was only a single hand pump for the roughly 10,500 people living in the area. He expressed disappointment with the humanitarian community for not having followed through on various promises to commence programs in Jebel Moon, and asked that they clearly communicate their intentions so that expectations can be managed. In response to this plea, Laurini contacted UN staff in El Geneina and confirmed that there was funding for water projects (UNICEF) in the area, though an implementing partner had yet to be identified. She also acknowledged the JEM's strong record in ensuring the safety of NGOs operating in their sector, but pointed out that the problem was not security in Jebel Moon itself but rather banditry and Arab militia activity along the road from El Geneina. On this point, Laurini committed to coordinate with the Force Commander about the possibility of providing AMIS troop escort to NGOs along the Geneina-Jebel Moon road. Aprezi informed the rebel group that he would host a conference with all NGOs in El Fasher within the next two weeks to better understand their concerns and improve working relations with the humanitarian community.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) While the meeting achieved no breakthroughs, it was an important symbolic gesture on the Force Commander's behalf, in conjunction with the UN, to demonstrate goodwill and accessibility to the JEM. The rebel group, for its part, made few political references, other than noting its rejection of the DPA and insistence on adhering to the HCFA. In side conversations, several field commanders confirmed that the military wing remains firmly aligned with political leader Khalil Ibrahim, and those with whom S/CRS Poloff spoke were aware of recent efforts in Chad to expand JEM's circle of influence.

19. (SBU) JEM field commanders were reluctant to discuss their troop strength in the region, but expressed confidence that Jebel Moon was firmly under their military control. The soldiers - wearing an assortment of military uniforms - displayed a relatively high level of discipline, as indicated by their weapons maintenance and handling (mostly small arms, including pistols, AK-47s, G3 rifles, and RPGs), local security posture (well-positioned and alert sentries) and the organized military formation provided upon the arrival of the Force Commander. No vehicles were present in the vicinity of the meeting and field Poloffs did not observe any from the helicopter, either when arriving or departing. Many of the JEM commanders spoke English and were university educated; these, in particular, were vaguely intrigued with the notion of peace, but were more preoccupied with everyday concerns such as improving access to water points and protecting the internally displaced persons community from further Janjaweed attacks.

POWERS